

GEOGRAPHIC ELEMENTS OF POWER
US/USSR AND FREE WORLD/SINO-SOVIET BLOC

INTRODUCTION

This paper proceeds from the assumption that the power of states and coalitions can be reduced for analytical purposes to a relatively few elements, some of which are mainly geographic. In selecting "geographic elements" for detailed consideration, many environmental factors of powerhood were weighed, but most were discarded as not sufficiently determinant, or as more susceptible of analysis with elements not essentially geographic.

The main relationship considered herein is area, which is examined in connection with four related factors or elements grouped as follows: (a) size and shape, and (b) position and boundaries.

? The size of a nation's territory may be a key to its economic and military power. Other things being equal, large states have more abundant resources than small ones, and thus a greater chance of achieving the industrial productivity essential to military might. Also, large states are generally better able to defend their territory than small ones, because they can trade space for time and are less likely to succumb to an initial thrust. Modern weaponry has added significance to size by making dispersal a key defense factor. Shape has little significance in itself, but may be important when considered with other factors. Theoretically, a compact shape has the greatest inherent strength, especially when accompanied by considerable size.

The principles of size applicable to states apply also in a general way to coalitions and blocs. The degree to which a coalition functions as a unified state, however, varies with the coordination and mutual assistance that takes place between parts. Size and shape may favor such coordination or militate against it.

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When very large coalitions or blocs are involved, it becomes difficult to draw a sharp line between size and shape and other factors.

Position in the sense of location relative to all physical phenomena (including climate zones) and cultural features of the earth, is a vital relationship in the makeup of a state. Position profoundly influences strategic relationships, the flow of goods, and the spread of ideas and other stimuli to human development. The position or exact location of a state on the surface of the earth may be fixed, but the implications of its position are continuously changing with technology and what other factors, and must be constantly reassessed. Boundaries, an aspect of involvement between states, are often critically important in determining the

capabilities of states and the type of relations that develop between them.

Position or relative location has much the same importance for coalitions that it has for states although, as a rule, the larger the coalition the more difficult it is to distinguish sharply between the influence of relative location and other factors. As with states, the implications of a coalition's relative location are constantly changing and require frequent reassessment. Boundaries of coalitions are important for the same reasons that the boundaries of states are important: they mirror and partly control the capabilities of adjacent entities as well as relations between them. Some state boundaries are also coalition boundaries and may, for this reason, take on added importance.

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The USSR, with an area of some 8,650,184 square miles, covers about one sixth of the earth's surface and is by far the world's largest single nation. The US, including Alaska and Hawaii, takes in 3,552,198 square miles, making it one of the largest countries in the world, but still smaller than the USSR or Canada.

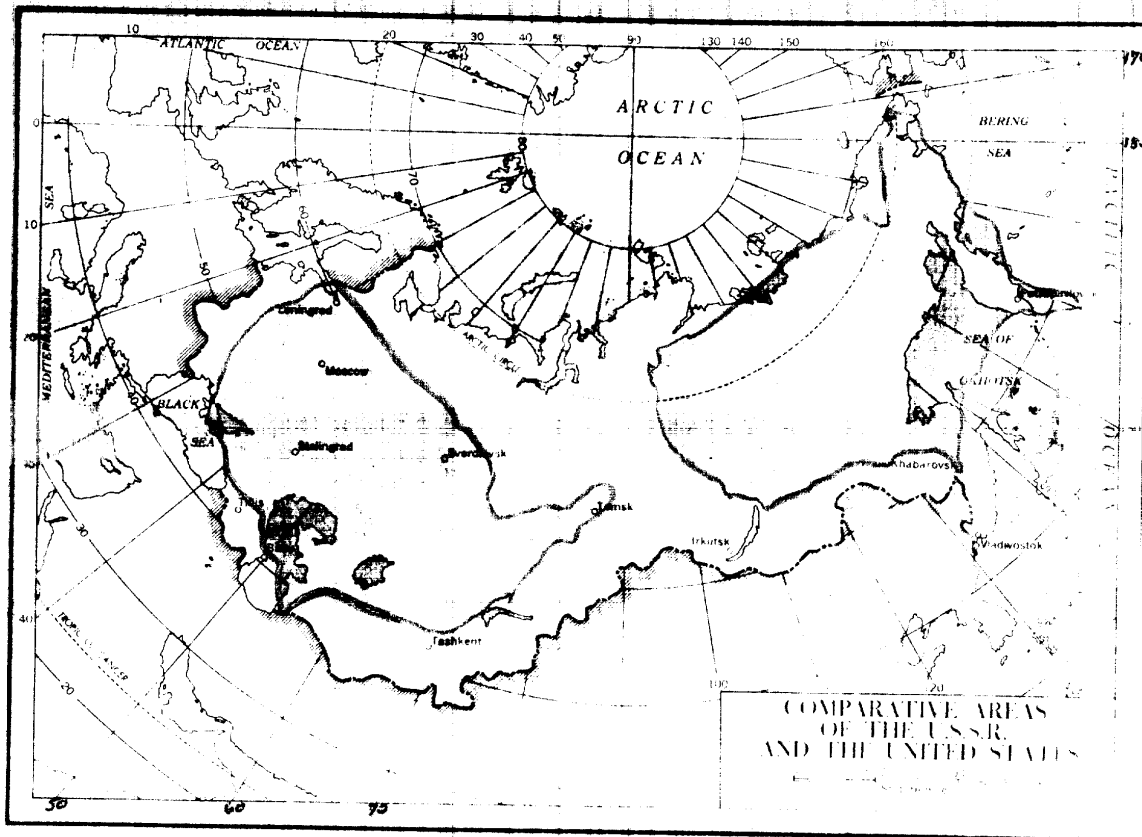


Fig. 1

Unlike the US, a great part of the USSR lies too far north for optimum habitation. In many places where the climate of the Soviet Union is good, the soil is poor, and some of the richest land lies in regions too dry or too cold for farming. No single area in the USSR compares in extent, favorable location, and profitable use with the Mississippi valley of the US. Although the communications network of the

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USSR is being expanded, it is still sparse and does not compare in adequacy with that of the US. Unlike the US, which has long coasts giving unrestricted access to the sea, the USSR coastlines are predominantly icebound and many stretches are virtually landlocked, restricting seaborne communications markedly. Weak

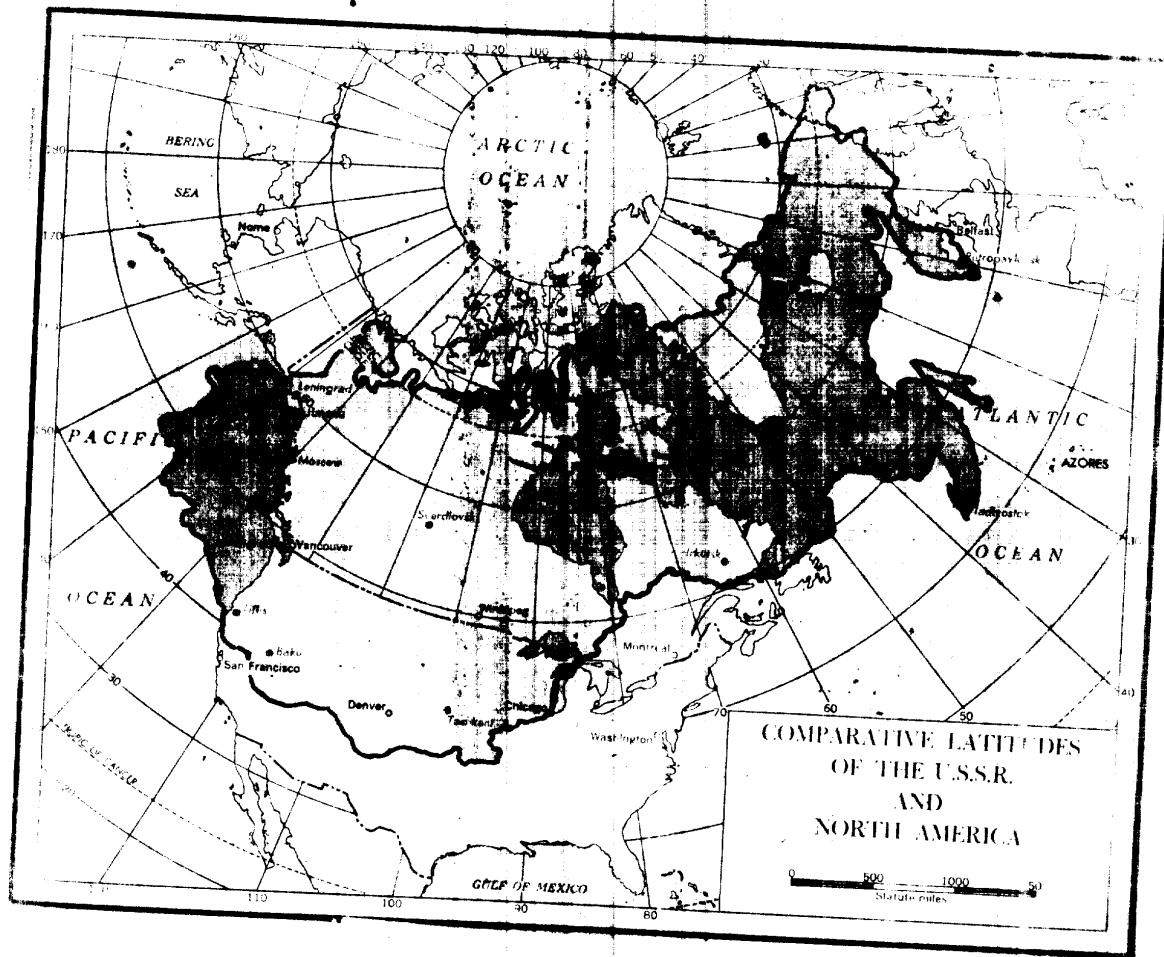


Fig. 2.

communications limit the USSR's ability to fully exploit its pivotal position and, to some extent, the resources of its vast area.

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In conventional* war, size and shape alone would give the USSR advantages over the US in depth of defense. Effective defense use of the USSR's vast spaces was well-illustrated in the Soviet victory over German forces during World War II. Untested, however, is the difference that greatly improved aircraft and other devices and techniques might make in conventional campaigns against large land powers such as the US and the USSR.

Size and shape considered alone give advantages to the Soviet Union in maneuverability in conventional war, mainly because the greater area of the USSR offers a wider range of space-for-time alternatives.

Developed resources are much more evenly dispersed in the continental US than in the USSR, which should, in theory, give the US advantages in conventional war. The few developed resources of Alaska, however, are very unevenly distributed and Alaska's overall level of development is somewhat comparable to that of sections of the Soviet Far East in the same latitude.

The USSR is more completely contiguous than the US and, in theory, would derive conventional war advantages from this. The contiguity of the US as a whole is broken significantly by the new States of Alaska and Hawaii. Apart from Alaska and Hawaii, the US has a compact, rectangular form that favors defense.

In nuclear war, size and shape alone would seem to give early warning advantages to the USSR, because of the greater distance of many targets from warning lines paralleling frontiers. It should be noted, however, that the Soviet Union's early warning advantage is largely nullified when Canada and Greenland are brought into defense equations on the side of the US. In all types of

*"Conventional" is used reservedly since whether or not nuclear weapons are ever again employed in warfare, the fact of their existence, the possibility that they can be used, will affect all future wars.

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targets (military, industrial areas, major cities), the USSR seems to have nuclear war dispersion advantages over the US. The greater size of the USSR offers exceptional advantages in dispersal and secrecy for military installations of target significance, including counter-missile forces.

If other countries are ignored, size and shape alone seem to give the US paramilitary advantages over the USSR, mainly because the smaller size of the US makes for greater cohesiveness and more widespread feelings of nationality. By contrast, the vastness of the USSR has been an important factor retarding the building of feelings of common nationality among the more than 200 non-Slav ethnic and cultural groups that make up some 25% of the USSR's population.

The position of the USSR gives it definite advantages over the US in distance from other power centers. For example:

Distance in statute miles from approximate geographic center of US or USSR to approximate geographic center of:		
<u>US</u>		<u>USSR</u>
<u>4,800</u>	Western Europe (France)	<u>3,500</u>
<u>7,000</u>	Middle East (Iraq)	<u>2,600</u>
<u>8,400</u>	India	<u>2,500</u>
<u>8,400</u>	Southeast Asia (Thailand)	<u>3,000</u>
<u>7,200</u>	China	<u>2,000</u>
<u>6,000</u>	Japan	<u>2,800</u>

From its pivot area, the USSR can attack more important centers over relatively short and nearly equidistant routes than any other major power.

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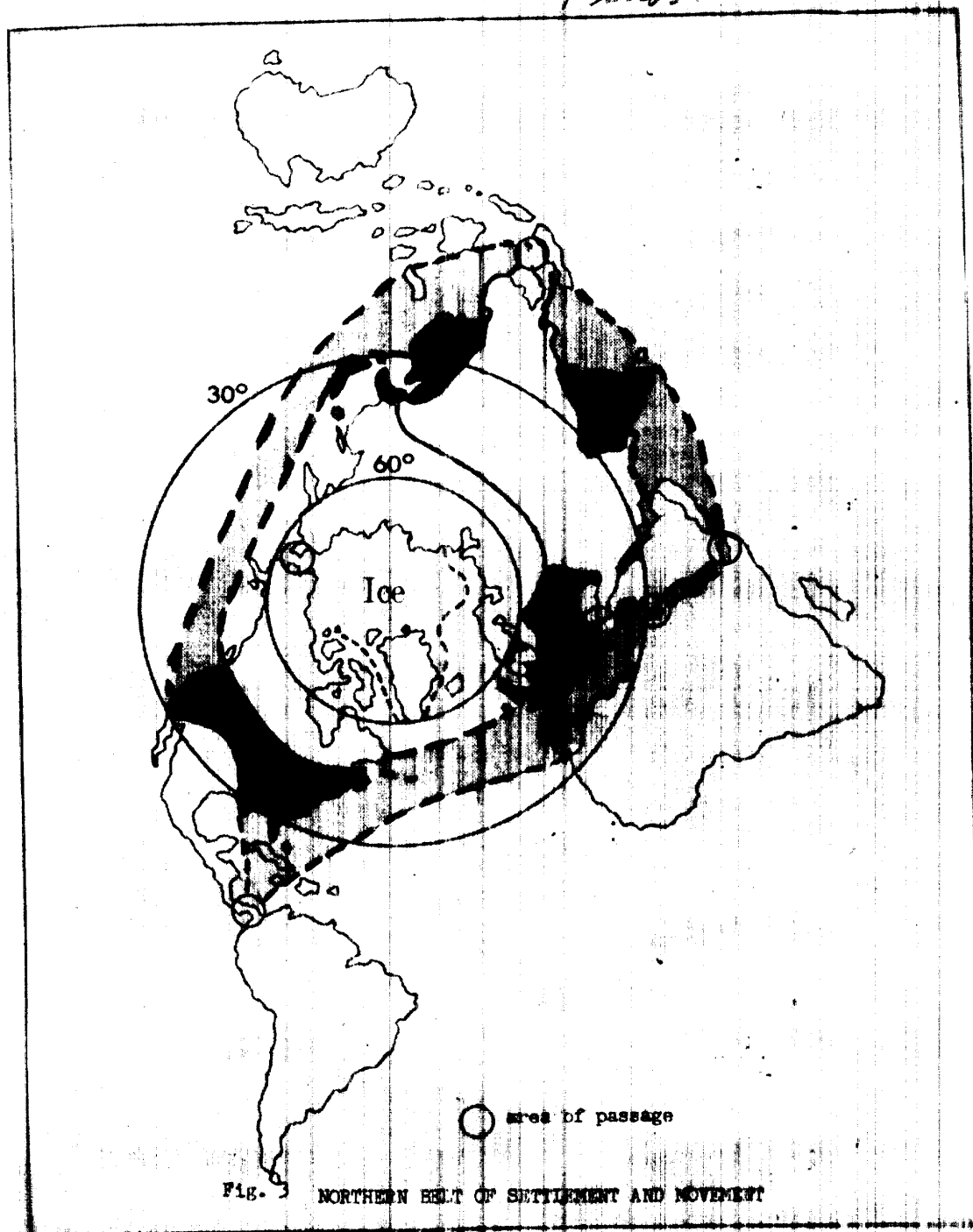
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The USSR derives theoretical conventional war advantages from being closer than the US to a greater number of critical areas of passage.

*nuclear ship
& subs*

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<u>US</u>	<u>Distance in miles from approximate geographic center of US and USSR to:</u>	<u>USSR</u>
3,200	Bering Strait	3,000
2,400	Panama Canal	7,800
4,700	Skagerrak and Kattegat	2,700
4,900	Straits of Gibraltar	4,300
6,000	Turkish Straits	2,800
6,700	Suez Canal	3,100
8,100	Bab el Mandeb	3,800
9,200	Singapore Strait	4,000

Military postures of adjoining states give the US significant advantages over the USSR, particularly if the political and psychological foundations of the postures are taken into account....e.g. mutual distrust between the USSR and its Satellite allies.

Even after allowing for the USSR's unfavorable location in relation to the sea, the Soviet Union would still seem to have overall advantages in access to objectives* around the rim of the Eurasian landmass. Elsewhere, the US would have the advantage.

*Places that may be of strategic or other interest to the US, the USSR, or both, perhaps simultaneously. Such places may be anywhere, but the more likely possibilities now seem to be points along the line of containment, i.e., the Eurasian rimland, including northeastern Africa.

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Comparative distances in miles - US and USSR to selected possible objectives

US		objective	USSR	
border to border	geographic center to geographic center		border to border	geographic center to geographic center
3,500	4,900	Berlin	300	3,000
4,500	6,300	Turkey	--	2,600
6,600	7,500	Tibet	500	1,800
6,700	8,300	Vietnam	2,000	3,000
4,700	6,500	Korea	--	2,300

In magnitude of border defense needs, marked advantages seem to accrue to the US, because, inter alia, the frontiers of the US are much shorter.

US/USSR - Comparative Frontier Lengths in Statute Miles

	Continental US	US (incl. Alaska and Hawaii)	USSR
General coastline*	4,840	12,255	26,700
Land Frontiers	5,906	7,447	11,000
Total	10,746	19,702	37,700

* Not to be confused with the detailed tidal shoreline, which is much longer, for example, for the continental US: 53,677 statute miles.

Position, considered reservedly, and boundaries seem to give the US tenuous paramilitary advantages over the USSR, mainly because of the large numbers of potentially hostile people who dwell along both sides of many boundaries of the USSR.

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Position and boundaries seem to give the USSR slight nonmilitary advantages over the US, easier access to the key production centers of the world being one. With more favorable access to the sea, the USSR's advantage would be much greater.

Strict comparison between the US and the USSR with regard to the "elements" size, shape, position, and boundaries shows a theoretical advantage in favor of the USSR. Rigorous US/USSR comparisons are somewhat artificial,* however, and do not seem in themselves to offer a basis for firm conclusions, mainly because much that is vital to US defense lies outside its limits.

*In comparing the US and the USSR, "position" must be treated reservedly lest the context shade into FREE WORLD/BLOC, a different frame of reference. Of the two comparative patterns, US/USSR and FREE WORLD/BLOC, the latter seems to be the only one now suitable for supporting definitive conclusions. US/USSR comparisons, however, have analytical value.

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FREE WORLD*/SINO-SOVIET BLOC

Ignoring Antarctica, the area of the Free World comprises some 40,000,000 square miles and that of the Sino-Soviet Bloc about 13,500,000 square miles. The Bloc, which is roughly triangular in shape, takes in most of the earth's largest continuous land area.

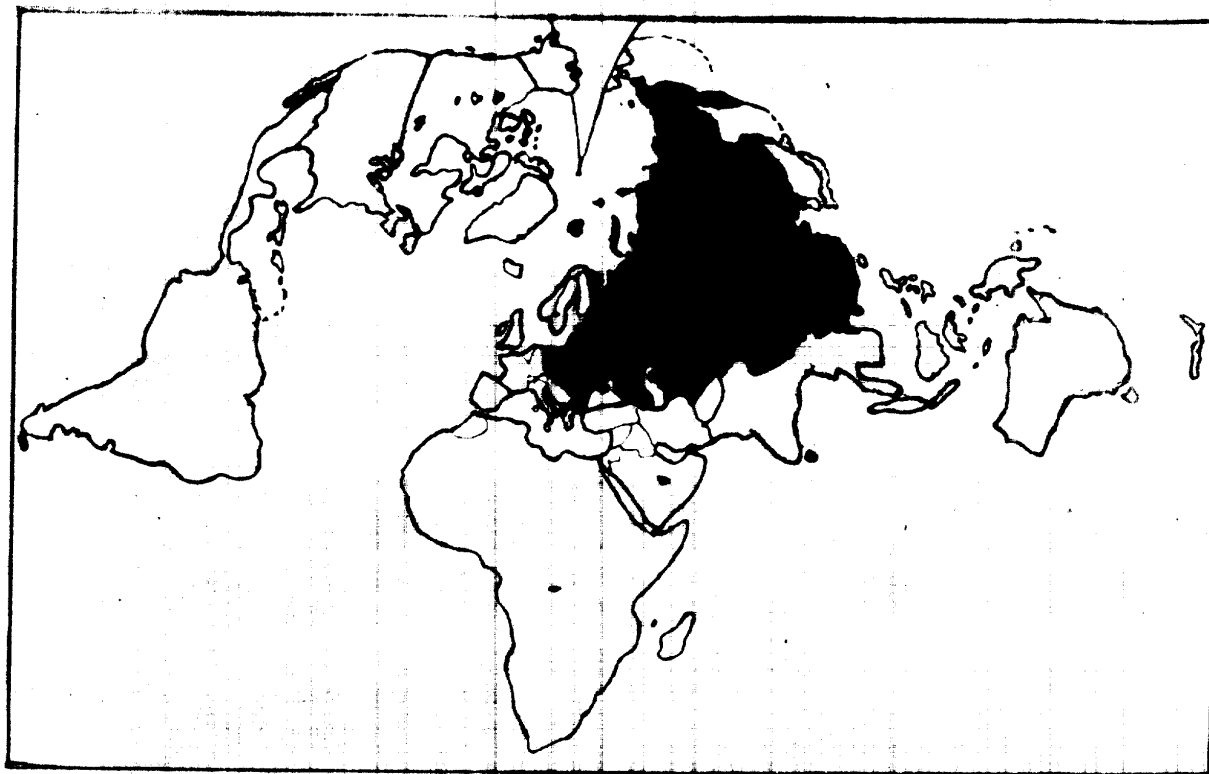


Fig. 4. FREE WORLD/SINO-SOVIET BLOC

Africa (11,530,000 sq. miles) is the only part of the Free World which comes close to matching the Bloc in size, shape, and compactness. If the Bloc were superimposed on Africa, and **Free World* here refers to all countries outside the Communist Bloc. The weighing of military relationships takes into account only those countries that now participate in defense arrangements to which the US is a party. This limitation, however, does not materially change basic patterns.

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the Middle East, Berlin would lie some 700 miles south of Capetown, Bering

Strait would be located near the Cape Verde Islands, and Northern Vietnam would

be in the vicinity of Tehran. Superimposition of the Bloc on North America

and the Pacific Ocean would put Bering Strait near Hawaii, North Vietnam near

the North Pole, and Albania, the only non-contiguous Bloc country, in

the vicinity of the Panama canal. In contrast to most of the Bloc, which

is continental in character, the Free World is dual---maritime and continental.

Ocean mobility gives the Free World such cohesiveness as it has and, from

another point of view, makes it penetrable in ways that the Bloc is not.

Insofar as they can be considered apart from other factors, size and shape seem to give significant nuclear war advantages to the Free World, particularly in the dispersion of retaliatory bases.



Fig. 5. Main US overseas bases.

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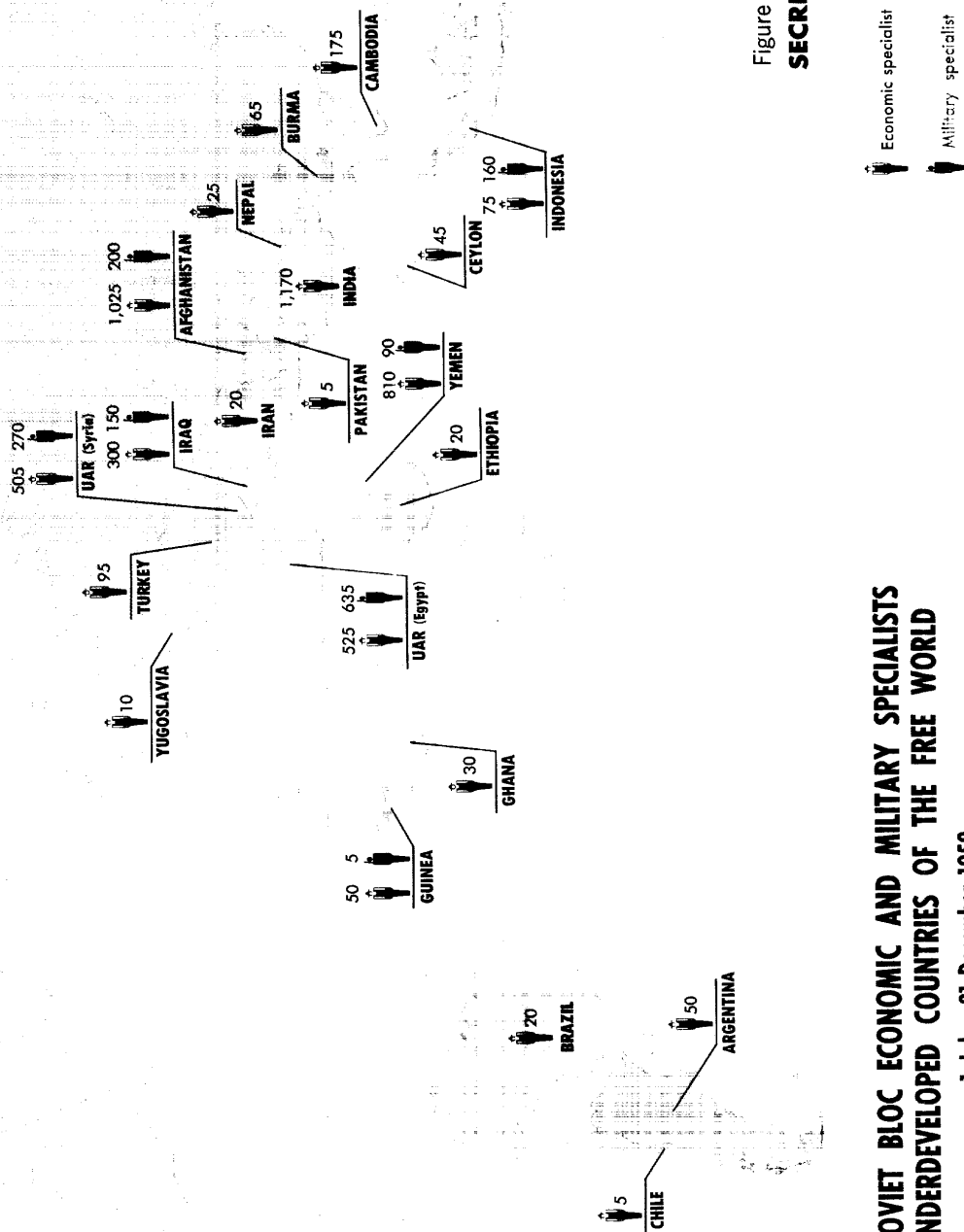
Size and shape alone seem to give the Bloc long-range paramilitary advantages, because the Free World is physically and politically fragmented and far more open to the Bloc as a UW theatre than the Bloc is open to the West.

Position and boundaries, to the extent that they can be separated from other factors, give the Free World vital advantages in nuclear attack/defense equations. The US, the core area of the Free World, is now vulnerable to direct attack only from bases on the Eurasian land mass and from submarines, whereas the USSR, the core area of the Bloc, is vulnerable to attack not only from North American bases, but also from bases on the periphery of the Eurasian landmass and from submarines and other craft in five seas.

Relative location and boundaries give some paramilitary advantages to the West in Europe. Elsewhere, however, these factors seem to reinforce benefits accruing to the Bloc from the fragmented shape of the West, giving the Bloc an overall advantage.

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**SINO-SOVIET BLOC ECONOMIC AND MILITARY SPECIALISTS
IN UNDERDEVELOPED COUNTRIES OF THE FREE WORLD**

1 July - 31 December 1959

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Considered collectively, size, shape, position and boundaries seem to give the Bloc significant overall nonmilitary advantages vis-à-vis the Free World, mainly because of two related relationships: (a) proximity (large parts of the Free World are closer to the core area of the Bloc than to the core area of the West), and (b) the relative openness of the West, i.e., the Free World is open to all types of Bloc penetrative activity, whereas the Bloc's situation strongly favors selective exclusion of the goods, people, and ideas of the West.

The interrelationships of size, shape, position and boundaries seem to give the Free World net advantages over the Bloc in nuclear war, particularly all-out nuclear war, mainly because of the West's encircling base structure. The Bloc, however, has theoretical conventional war, paramilitary, and nonmilitary advantages, because of its greater compactness as contrasted to the openness of the Free World.

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TRENDS

Size seems certain to increase in importance as an element of national power. Developments of 1960-70 in transportation, weather control, water desalting, etc., may call for much reevaluation of the size factor in weighing existing and potential strength of the US against that of the USSR.

The USSR's considerable dispersion potential will, presumably, be exploited much more fully over the next ten years than it has been to date. By contrast, what the US can hope to accomplish dispersion-wise will be limited by the relatively smaller size of the continental US.

In the next decade, the seas, which cover about 9/10ths of the earth's surface, may take on added importance as dispersion space, giving new significance to the location of landmasses in relation to the sea, and new meanings to "control of the sea."

The expected spread of nuclear capabilities in the Eurasian landmass may make the centrality of the USSR's position less advantageous than it now seems. From a relative location point of view, the USSR will have more reason than the US to be apprehensive about the growing nuclear capabilities of Eastern countries.

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As long as near equality in delivery systems is maintained, relative location will continue to give the Free World advantages in close to target retaliatory bases, and thus will contribute significantly to the West's deterrent.

Recognition of the importance of size to great power status may motivate certain regions to an increasing degree toward unification of states, e.g., Western Europe.

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TRANSMITTAL SLIP		DATE
TO: <i>Ch/2</i>		
ROOM NO.	BUILDING	
REMARKS: <i>P.11 + 12 Superimposition over Africa, Berlin south of Capetown? how? Bering St. vs. Cape Verde Islands?</i>		
FROM: <i>D/66</i>		
ROOM NO.	BUILDING	EXTENSION

FORM NO. 241
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WHICH MAY BE USED.

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